Policy Matters

Parliamentary Secretaries

The Consequences of Constant Rotation

IRPP
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC POLICY
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Peter Dobell

September 2001

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Summary

The practice of rotating parliamentary secretaries (PS's) every two years that was initiated by Prime Minister Trudeau and taken up by Prime Minister Chrétien has profound consequences for the way the House of Commons functions. This study analyses how appointments have been made since the office was first established and assesses the consequences of the current practice.

Under the present practice, PS's know that after two years in the post their appointment will not be renewed, no matter how well they perform. Consequently ministers have little incentive to assign them significant responsibility, except when a PS brings prior experience or expertise to the position. Some PS's develop productive working relations with their ministers and the appointment does offer a few material perquisites — a salary supplement, a title, some staff support and occasionally overseas travel on departmental business. Not surprisingly, however, when PS's are replaced by a colleague regardless of their performance in office, the natural reaction is disappointment.

The frequent rotation of PS's is not an isolated phenomenon. It has repercussions for other elements of the parliamentary system, in particular parliamentary committees. Usually those removed from the position of parliamentary secretary press their party whip to find them another office. The chair of a committee is the preferred prize and frequently several openings exist, since a number of chairpersons have usually been appointed to the vacant PS positions. And so another round of musical chairs takes place. The net result is that a practice, introduced by Mr. Trudeau to share among members of the government caucus the material rewards and the responsibilities that come with the office of parliamentary secretary, has become an important constraint on the effectiveness of committees.

The practice of other prime ministers with respect to parliamentary secretaries differed substantially. A detailed review of PS appointments by prime ministers since Mackenzie King reveals that five — King, St. Laurent, Diefenbaker, Pearson and Mulroney — frequently reappointed effective PS's to the office for several years and treated them as additions to the executive. Moreover, some who proved their worth in the PS position were later promoted to cabinet.

A decision by government to revert to the practice of reappointing competent PS's for multiple terms would bring several benefits. Incumbents would have the time to gain skills and expertise that would equip them to carry more responsibility in that office. Stability in the PS position would also remove a principal cause for the regular replacement of committee chairpersons. If chairpersons — along with other committee members — remained in place for longer

periods, committees could become more effective and play a more important role in the parliamentary process. This would provide a source of fulfilling activity for backbench members that could offset any frustration that might emerge from the reduced opportunity for a PS appointment. Together these steps would offer private members more predictable, satisfying and constructive career paths — and would make the House of Commons a more effective and productive institution.

Résumé

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La pratique du remplacement bisannuel des secrétaires parlementaires (SP), instaurée par Pierre Elliott Trudeau et reprise par Jean Chrétien, a de profondes répercussions sur le fonctionnement de la Chambre des communes. Pour en faire la démonstration, cette étude analyse le processus de nomination des SP depuis la création du poste et évalue les conséquences de la pratique actuelle.

Selon la pratique en usage, les SP savent qu'ils quitteront leurs fonctions au terme de deux ans, quelle que soit la façon dont ils s'acquittent de leur mandat. Les ministres sont donc peu enclins à leur confier de véritables responsabilités, sauf s'ils possèdent une expérience ou une expertise particulièrement riches. Certains SP développent tout de même avec leur ministre des rapports de travail productifs, le titre offrant par ailleurs quelques avantages : supplément de salaire, prestige, personnel de soutien et voyages occasionnels outre-mer pour affaires ministérielles. On ne s'étonnera donc pas de la déception des SP lorsque, sans égard à leur compétence, on les remplace le moment venu par un collègue.

Or, cette fréquente rotation des SP n'a rien d'anodin. Elle se répercute sur d'autres composantes du système parlementaire et notamment sur les comités parlementaires. D'abord parce que les SP auxquels on a retiré leur titre font généralement pression sur le whip de leur parti pour obtenir un autre poste. La présidence d'un comité compte alors parmi les récompenses les plus convoitées, d'autant que la fonction est souvent à prendre puisque les présidents de comités sont couramment nommés aux postes vacants de SP. Ainsi se perpétue le jeu de chaises musicales. Ainsi se trouve également compromise l'efficacité des comités, même si cette rotation visait au départ, selon les vœux de M. Trudeau, à répartir entre les membres du caucus gouvernemental les récompenses et responsabilités associées au poste de secrétaire parlementaire.

L'approche des autres premiers ministres était pourtant fort différente. L'examen détaillé des nominations depuis Mackenzie King révèle en effet que cinq d'entre eux — soit King lui-même, Saint-Laurent, Diefenbaker, Pearson et Mulroney — ont souvent prolongé de plusieurs années le mandat des secrétaires parlementaires compétents et considéraient ceux-ci comme faisant partie de l'exécutif. Certains SP s'étant particulièrement illustrés dans leurs fonctions ont même été promus au Cabinet.

Le gouvernement bénéficierait de plusieurs avantages en renouant avec cette pratique du maintien en fonction des SP compétents. Les titulaires du poste auraient le temps voulu pour acquérir le savoir-faire et l'expertise leur permettant d'assumer des responsabilités plus importantes. Cette stabilisation viendrait éliminer la principale cause de la rotation des présidents de comités. Leur président

et leurs membres exerçant leurs fonctions plus longtemps, les comités gagneraient en efficacité et joueraient un plus grand rôle dans le processus parlementaire. En outre, les députés d'arrière-banc y trouveraient des possibilités d'activités gratifiantes, ce qui compenserait leurs moindres chances d'accéder au poste de SP. L'ensemble de ces mesures permettrait enfin à tous les députés d'envisager une carrière plus riche et plus suivie, et ferait de la Chambre des communes une institution plus efficace et plus productive.

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The appointment of MPs to the office of parliamentary secretary (PS), a process that usually occurs each autumn, attracts little attention. This is unfortunate since the practice of wholesale rotation every two years that was initiated by Prime Minister Trudeau has profound consequences for the way the House of Commons functions and for the satisfaction that private members derive from the job of MP. This study analyses how appointments have been made since the office was first established and assesses the consequences of the current practice of regular rotation every two years.

The Current Situation

When Prime Minister Chrétien announced in December 1993 the names of the first group of 23 MPs to be appointed to the office of parliamentary secretary, he described them as ministers in training and cautioned cabinet ministers to perform well lest they be outshone and replaced. The announcement did not come as a surprise since it reflected his own experience. Mr. Chrétien's career took off when Prime Minister Pearson appointed him parliamentary secretary in the 26th Parliament (1963-65), reappointed him immediately following the 1965 election, and, after a total of 21 months as a parliamentary secretary, elevated him to the ministry.

But the Prime Minister's words of caution proved to have no substance. Two years later, in February 1996, a wholesale rotation of parliamentary secretaries was announced. The press release issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) reported that the "Prime Minister has adopted the practice of previous governments of completely rotating parliamentary secretaries." The practice has been followed ever since by the Chrétien government. Parliamentary secretaries have been regularly replaced after two successive one-year terms in that office.

This practice of rotating PS's has contrasted dramatically with the stability of the Chrétien cabinet. A defining characteristic of the three governments that he has headed has been the exceptional continuity of the ministry. Not only have few MPs been elevated from the backbenches to the cabinet, but during the eight years of Chrétien government, there have been relatively few shuffles within cabinet, especially in senior portfolios.

A persuasive case can be made for leaving effective ministers in charge of important departments. Not only does this practice promote good government, because it permits a minister to set and pursue longer-term goals, it also offers successful incumbents a high level of job satisfaction.

Though the same arguments could apply to parliamentary secretaries, they have not been offered the same stability as cabinet ministers. Under the present practice, PS's know that after two years in the post their appointment will not be renewed, no matter how well they perform. Reg Alcock, addressing a group of his colleagues at a meeting on Parliament Hill on May 10, 2000, spoke quite candidly on the subject:

> *I want to focus on the turnover that takes place on the government side at all levels. I am currently a parliamentary secretary. I know the day I am appointed that my term will end in two years. As a result people in the department that are working with me have no real incentive to invest any time and energy in that relationship. And conversely, I know that I am going to leave … in a prescribed time. So there is an uneasiness in that relationship.*[1]

As Alcock points out, the consequence of this practice is that a minister has little incentive to assign significant responsibility to a member who will be moved two years later, unless by chance the member already has solid grounding in the department's business or has had previous experience as a PS. By the same token, unless the minister gives specific direction, senior public servants in the department are not inclined to reach out to their PS.

The position of PS does bring a few material perquisites: a salary supplement of $11,200, usually some staff support provided by the department and occasionally overseas travel on departmental business. PS's are expected in turn to undertake some regular tasks: answer questions when their minister is absent from the House, usually on Fridays; provide supplementary information during the "late show" at the end of sitting days; and sit on the standing committee to which the department reports. Since in most instances "answers" are prepared for PS's by officials, their short appointment to a ministry and consequent lack of specific knowledge does not present many risks for the government. In effect, a primary function of the system as it now works is to offer a title and a modest financial reward to some twenty-five additional government backbenchers every two years.

When the two years come to an end and they are replaced by a colleague, the natural reaction is disappointment, even a sense of rejection. That sentiment was well expressed by Clifford Lincoln in a letter to his colleagues who were holding a wake in March 1996 (which he could not attend) on the occasion of their group replacement in the office of PS. In sardonic language he wrote:

When I received the Prime Minister's letter advising me in such lofty and sincere language that I had served my country with intelligence, nobility, dedication and utmost efficiency...I could not help wonder why, if I had been so proficient, I was being fired at the same time.

The frequent rotation of PS's is not an isolated phenomenon. It has repercussions for other elements of the parliamentary system. The natural instinct of a government member whose term as PS has come to an end is to press the party whip to find him or her another office. The chair of a committee is the preferred prize. Usually a number of openings exist, since frequently the government has already appointed a number of chairpersons to the vacant PS positions. And so another round of musical chairs takes place.

The high turnover among chairpersons, due to the rotation of PS's, is recorded in Table 1. Apart from the complete change that occurs when a new party takes power, the only exception to the comprehensive change every two years was Prime Minister Mulroney's decision to leave the majority of chairpersons in office during the four years of the 33rd Parliament (1984-88).

The consequences of the regular rotation of PS's are much more serious nowadays than they were in 1970 when Prime Minister Trudeau initiated the practice. At that time, committees only met during a three-month period to review the estimates — a frustrating and unproductive task — unless they received a special order from the House, something that happened infrequently. Therefore, the lack of continuity of chairs of committees was of little consequence. In 1985, however, Prime Minister Mulroney's government gave committees the power to meet when they wished and to set their own agendas. Committees thereby acquired a potential that had not previously existed and a committee chairmanship offered the prospect of a substantially enhanced role for private members. But to realize this potential, chairs need to remain in office long enough to learn about the subject for which the committee is responsible and to master the skills of presiding. More importantly, it also takes time to gain the confidence of the members of the committee, particularly those from the opposition. The frequent turnover of committee chairs has, as a result, hindered their effectiveness and that of their committees.[2]

So it was that a practice, introduced by Mr. Trudeau to share among members of the government caucus the material rewards and the responsibilities that come with the office of parliamentary secretary, became — once committees were given by Prime Minister Mulroney the right to meet year round — a constraint on the effectiveness of committees.[1] The consequences were well expressed by John Harvard at the May 10, 2000 meeting on Parliament Hill, when he (at the time chair of the Agriculture Committee) said:

Table 1
Turnover of Chairs of Parliamentary Committees, 1984 to 2000

Parliament Session	Years	No. of House Committees which elected chairs	Chairs re-elected	Newly elected chairs who had previously served on committee	Newly elected chairs who had not been a member of committee before their election
33rd Parliament 1st Session	1984-86	24	—	—	—
33rd Parliament 2nd Session	1986-88	28*	19	—	9
34th Parliament 1st Session	1988	(lasted just long enough to approve Free Trade Agreement. No committees formed.)			
34th Parliament 2nd Session	1989-91	22	4	5	13
34th Parliament 3rd Session	1991-93	21	8	5	8
35th Parliament 1st Session	1994-96	22	—	—	—
35th Parliament 2nd Session	1996-97	21	6	3	12
36th Parliament 1st Session	1997-99	20	6	2	12
36th Parliament 2nd Session	1999-2000	20	6	6	8

* Five committees were established in the last month of the first session. They were among those re-elected a few months later.

Note: Precise calculations and comparisons cannot be made for several reasons. First, from session to session and from Parliament to Parliament there are often changes in the number and even the responsibility of standing committees. Secondly, some changes take place during a session. Thirdly it is not possible to secure some information. Fourthly when a change of government occurs as it did in 1994, a wholesale change naturally takes place. However, these figures should be regarded as illustrative of a trend.

> *Now with respect to the stability of committees, I think it is crazy the way we rotate. I have been chairman of agriculture for two years. I think I am a better chairman now than I was two years ago....I hope I have learned something and I would hope – are you listening, whip? – I would hope that I could have this job come the fall because I think I can contribute more. I also look around to my committee members. I know that those who have been on there for a year or two are doing a much better job now than they were when they started. I really think that committee members should be appointed for the life of a Parliament.*[4]

When committees were formed after the election of November 2000, Harvard was no longer a member of the Agriculture Committee. Nor is he chair of either of the two committees on which he now serves.

Having identified the consequences of rotating PS's every two years, it is appropriate to examine the accuracy of the PMO's assertion about past practice in its statement of February 1996: "the Prime Minister has adopted the practice of previous governments of completely rotating parliamentary secretaries."

The Practice of Previous Governments: An Overview

Mr. Chrétien has indeed closely followed the practice initiated by Prime Minister Trudeau, who, in 1970, amended the law governing the office of parliamentary secretary, increasing the number of positions by providing for one PS for each department. He indicated at the time that he intended to rotate incumbents at biennial intervals and that is what he did. The maximum length of continuous service, enjoyed by only four among scores of MPs appointed PS by Mr. Trudeau, was 33 months.

In spite of the assertion in the PMO's press release of February 1996, the practice with regard to the appointment of PS's initiated by Mr. Trudeau and closely emulated by Mr. Chrétien actually bears little resemblance to that of other prime ministers, Liberal and Conservative. Under Prime Ministers King, St. Laurent, Diefenbaker, Pearson and Mulroney, effective PS's were often reappointed to the office for several years. While the terms of some who failed to measure up were not extended, and a few PS's received different but equally significant positions such as whip or caucus chair, the practice of all five prime ministers

was to renew the term of many PS's — often for the life of the Parliament and even for a second Parliament — and to elevate some directly to the ministry. In short, as this and the following section will demonstrate, these five prime ministers treated PS's as additions to the executive, leaving them in office long enough to learn the job and make a contribution, while also treating the office as a testing ground for ministers. In effect, the PS position offered for effective incumbents a kind of career path.

A detailed examination of the approach to the office of PS of each of the five prime ministers named above will reveal a few differences. Some prime ministers reappointed PS's to the same ministry for many years, while others moved a PS through as many as three and, very occasionally, four or more departments. Not surprisingly their practice was influenced by the situation they faced: whether they headed majority or minority governments, how many governments they led, and the turnover in membership of the governing party from one election to the next. These different conditions, for example, affected the options open to Mr. Diefenbaker. He led two minority governments, interspersed by a Parliament with the largest government majority until that time, and as a result he faced a rapidly changing scene. But all of these five prime ministers reappointed several PS's for a number of successive terms, which permitted these members to feel that their contribution was recognized in a tangible way and ensured a measure of stability in parliamentary offices.

This conclusion runs counter to the few previous studies of the office of PS, which have reported that the average term of incumbents lasted between one and two years only.[5] The authors appear to have reached this conclusion by counting a shift of ministry for a given individual as a different appointment, even when the new appointment was announced the next day. In addition, some prime ministers, such as Mr. Pearson, terminated appointments when calling an election, but then reappointed them immediately after the election. Others, such as Mr. Mulroney, left PS's in office until the next election took place and immediately reappointed some. In this study, we treat reappointments of this sort as continuous service. Applying this methodology reveals considerable stability in PS postings and suggests that these five prime ministers regarded appointments to that office as a launch on a potential career path. MPs who proved their worth could usually expect to be re-appointed or even promoted to the ministry.

The next section describes in detail how Prime Ministers King, St. Laurent, Diefenbaker, Pearson and Mulroney handled appointments to the office of parliamentary secretary. The commentaries are supported by tables in the Appendix, detailing the length of service, along with promotion and demotion patterns, for all PS's appointed by each leader.

Peter Dobell

The Practice of Previous Governments: Detailed Analysis

The position of parliamentary secretary in the Canadian Parliament was first established by order-in-council during the Great War of 1914-18 to provide support to overworked ministers. Three MPs were appointed to the position by Prime Minister Borden, but the office lapsed with the defeat of his government in 1921. The position was revived by Prime Minister King during the Second World War for the same reason, with seven order-in-council appointments made in 1943. Of the seven initial appointments, five were elevated to the cabinet at the end of the war, evidence that their competence had been demonstrated to Mr. King during their term as parliamentary secretaries.

Starting at the end of the war, the three years of Liberal government under Mr. King and the nine subsequent years under Mr. St. Laurent can be regarded as a continuum. Mr. King continued to appoint PS's after the war to replace those members who had been elevated to the ministry. One was made a minister by Mr. King after serving 31 months as PS; two others were subsequently elevated to the ministry by Prime Minister St. Laurent (see Table A-1).

In all, Mr. St. Laurent elevated eight MPs who had served apprenticeships as PS's directly to the ministry. Table A-1 indicates how long each served as PS before being appointed to the ministry, including their length of service under Mr. King (if any) and Mr. St. Laurent. These apprenticeships ranged from 9 to 45 months. Thus, the typical practice under Mr. St. Laurent was to test ministerial appointees in the office of PS and to name them to the cabinet directly from that position.

The next two tables record the number of successive years that MPs who were not elevated to the ministry served as PS's under these two prime ministers. Table A-2 covers those who were first appointed as PS by Mr. King, and subsequently extended in that office by Mr. St. Laurent. It is noteworthy that three of the five served continuously for six to ten years under the two prime ministers. Table A-3 lists those first appointed by Mr. St. Laurent. Again, four of the sixteen members served six or more years and two-thirds held the office for over three and a half years. Significantly, none of the MPs appointed PS by Mr. St. Laurent were returned to the back benches.

The message is clear. When Prime Ministers King and St. Laurent named PS's, they regarded the appointment as a first step up a ladder. It could lead to the ministry. However, those who were not elevated could nevertheless expect continuous service as PS providing they were effective. This approach gave appointees both an opportunity to demonstrate their mettle and sufficient time

in office to make a personal contribution. The total numbers appointed were small and the office was clearly perceived as a way to strengthen the ministry.

The three Diefenbaker governments lacked the stability of the preceding Liberal governments and this was reflected in the appointment of PS's. Following nine months of minority government, in 1958 Mr. Diefenbaker won the largest majority achieved up to that time, which was in turn followed by another minority government in 1962. PS appointments were accordingly affected by the large turnover of government MPs.

Following his 1958 election victory, Mr. Diefenbaker decided to increase the number of PS's to 16 and to establish the office by legislation, rather than making order-in-council appointments. Pending passage of the Parliamentary Secretaries bill he made no appointments. Indeed, there was a lapse of 21 months between the calling of the election in February 1958 and the first appointments under the bill in the autumn of 1959. However, this study treats as continuous service PS's appointed for the 23rd Parliament (1957-8) providing they were included in the first round of appointments in the 24th Parliament (1958-62).

The first point to be noted is that Mr. Diefenbaker appointed nine ministers after they had been tested as PS's (see Table A-4). With one exception they were raised from PS to minister directly. Two of them served terms as PS in two successive Parliaments before their elevation.

As for PS's who were not made minister, the combination of the interval of 21 months (while the bill was being drafted and passed) and the number of Progressive Conservative members defeated in 1962, leads to a record that is harder to analyse. Table A-5 indicates that, of the 27 appointments to the office, only six were not reappointed. Seven were defeated in 1958 or 1962 and therefore not available for reappointment. New appointments in 1962 — of which there were quite a few due to the large number of government members defeated in the election that year — had a maximum of six months in office, before the government fell. In all, PS's held office for only 47 months during the three Diefenbaker ministries. So, while PS's under Prime Minister Diefenbaker enjoyed a less evident career path than they did under Mr. St. Laurent, it is equally clear that he was not following a policy of regular rotation.

The same is true of Prime Minister Pearson. The record during his time in office makes it clear that he looked on parliamentary secretaries as junior members of the government, potentially available for promotion. When he assumed office in 1963, he immediately named five men to the cabinet who had earlier served as PS's under Mr. St. Laurent. Of these, three had over six continuous years in that office (Table A-6). Subsequently Mr. Pearson appointed nine other members to the ministry following a period as PS. These included Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Chrétien (Table A-7).

Meanwhile, those PS's not promoted to cabinet by Mr. Pearson were generally kept in the position for an extended period. As Table A-8 shows, eight of the twelve PS's appointed at the beginning of the 26th Parliament (1963-65) served the full term and were reappointed to that office in the 27th Parliament (1965-68), where they again served for the full term; while among the seven MPs first appointed to the office of PS in the 27th Parliament, four served for the full term. In addition, a handful of PS's appointed by Mr. Pearson, most long-serving, were eventually named cabinet ministers by Prime Minister Trudeau. The only significant movement in the PS position during the Pearson years was departmental rotation, as Mr. Pearson moved a number of PS's to two, three or even four ministries.

Prime Minister Mulroney adopted broadly similar practices. He, however, had to manage a larger complement of PS's, as he inherited the law on parliamentary secretaries introduced by Mr. Trudeau which provided for a PS for each department. When Mr. Mulroney greatly expanded the number of Secretaries of State (ministers who do not sit in cabinet), this automatically opened up more PS positions. In fact, there were so many offices created that he often made a PS responsible for two or even three departments or agencies at the same time.

Thirteen persons whom Mr. Mulroney appointed as minister first served as PS, one for over eight years and two others for three or more years (see Table A-9). As for those who were not elevated to the ministry, 22 remained as PS for at least four years of continuous service. Indeed, three remained in office during the entire eight and a half years that Mr. Mulroney was Prime Minister and another eight held the office from five to six and a half years (see Table A-10). Leonard Gustafson remained Mr. Mulroney's parliamentary secretary for the whole period, surely evidence of the value that the Prime Minister saw in stability in the office.

The Consequences of Biennial Rotation

MPs are usually delighted when first appointed to the position of PS, particularly if they are assigned to a major ministry. Once in the position, their sense of satisfaction depends on the extent to which the minister to whom they report gives them substantive responsibility. Results vary: some are gratified, others frustrated. But when the two-year term comes to an end and they are replaced by a colleague, disappointment is a common reaction.

The government also loses an asset. It takes time for MPs when first appointed as PS to a ministry to learn enough of the substance of the department's business to make a contribution, less time of course if they are already knowledgeable about the subject. They also have to learn how to speak for the

department in the House and in public and they need time to gain the confidence of their minister and of departmental officials. Contrary to the claim frequently made when new appointments are announced that a short term as PS helps the incumbent to gain new experience, the aphorism "Jack of all trades, master of none" is closer to the truth. From the perspective of ministers, if they knew that their parliamentary secretary might be assigned to the department for several years, they would normally be inclined to allocate greater responsibility to incumbents, perhaps even to make them responsible for evaluating advice on a segment of the department's mandate.

The practice of rotating PS's every two years seems to presume that unrest in the government caucus is kept in check by giving as many government members as possible the opportunity to serve as PS and to benefit from the additional compensation attached to the office. The objective is to "share the wealth" and avoid a situation where some members appear to be given preferred treatment. Unfortunately, this approach and the musical chairs it engenders means that private members rarely remain long enough in a position of responsibility to make a contribution. In a world of increasing specialization, a member who has had sustained involvement in one field of activity is more likely at the end of his or her time in Parliament to be able to point to personal achievements. Parliament too would be better served if members attained a reasonable level of expertise in specific policy areas.

There are a limited number of PS positions, so that a decision to return to the practice of reappointing some PS's for several years would mean that a large majority of the remaining private members in the government party could not aspire to an appointment to that position. At first sight, Prime Ministers King, St. Laurent, Diefenbaker and Pearson might have faced this problem, because committees, which can offer another career path, were not then meeting on a regular basis. That private members under these leaders did not appear to be frustrated by this situation can be accounted for by two facts: under Prime Ministers King and St. Laurent, the House of Commons was the centre of genuine debate that influenced policy; and under Prime Ministers Diefenbaker and Pearson, there were four minority parliaments which meant that debate in the House remained engrossing and the outcome of votes was never certain.

Because these conditions no longer apply, unhappiness on the back benches might be anticipated if the regular rotation of PS's was abandoned. But a solution to this potential problem now exists: if parliamentary committees had greater stability of membership, leading to more effective work, they could offer an important alternative source of fulfilling activity and avenue of career advancement. The fact that a few committees have undertaken important and challenging work, which has been taken seriously by the government, proves the point.

Thus, active and productive committees offer a possible solution to the difficulty that would be faced by a government if PS's were to be reappointed rather than rotated. The challenge would be to provide an alternative career path for those not appointed as PS. If private members were to be offered continuity of service on committees, they would have time to learn about the subject for which the committee is responsible, permitting them to gain the detailed knowledge needed to hold departments to account. With continuity of membership, committees could make longer-term plans, learn how to work together and not have to start anew every year or two. In addition, as members gained experience on a committee and demonstrated their competence, they should have the opportunity to work their way upward by becoming a sub-committee chair or vice-chair of the full committee, and eventually chair of the whole committee.

Continuous service on a committee could thus become a career path for government members, and indeed for members of all parties. It is noteworthy that lengthier service on committees was strongly supported by MPs who responded to a questionnaire circulated in May 2000 by the Parliamentary Centre. Over 80 percent favoured greater stability of chairpersons and committee members and supported appointments to committees for two years or more.[6]

For these changes to happen, political parties would have to decide that they were prepared to extend the term of committee appointments. In addition, the government would have to be prepared to recognize seniority and competence as criteria for the election of chairs, as well as looking for ways to enhance the significance and value of committee work. Supplementary compensation for chairs and vice-chairs would also remove one ground for rotating PS's and committee chairs.

It has been argued that, with the increase in the 1980s in the number of secretary of state positions, a government has less need for experienced PS's. There is some validity to this claim. Nevertheless, government has become more complex and Mr. Mulroney, who appointed a large number of secretaries of state, likewise found it worthwhile to extend the terms of competent PS's.

A decision by government to revert to the practice of reappointing competent PS's for multiple terms would bring several benefits. Incumbents would have the time to gain skills and expertise and so strengthen the ministry. Stability in the PS position would remove a principal cause for the regular replacement of committee chairpersons, a process that has seriously limited the latter's effectiveness. It should also then be possible to stabilize committee membership, a move that would further add to their productivity. Together these steps would offer private members more predictable, satisfying and constructive career paths — and would make the House of Commons a more effective and productive institution.

Appendix: Detailed Tables

Table A-1
Parliamentary Secretaries Under PMs King and St. Laurent Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS Before Elevation Under				
	King	St. Laurent	Total	No. of Depts.	Notes
Robert Mayhew	31	-	31	1	Appointed to the Ministry by PM King and retained by PM St. Laurent
Robert Winters	13	-	13	2	Remainder elevated by PM St. Laurent
Walter Harris	13	14	27	2	
James Sinclair	-	45	45	1	
Jean Lesage	-	32	32	2	
Ralph Campney	-	21	21	1	
George Prudlam	-	11	11	1	
Roch Pinard	-	9	9	1	

Table A-2
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM King, Re-appointed by PM St. Laurent and Not Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS	No. of Parliaments	No. of Depts.	Reason for Termination
Robert McCubbin	114	3	1	Defeat of government in 1957
George McIlraith	89	2	3	Not returned in 1953
Paul-Émile Côté	73	2	1	Resigned and appointed judge
Ralph Maybank	40	2	2	Resigned and appointed judge
Gleason Belzile	31	2	1	Died (July 1950)

Table A-3
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM St. Laurent and Not Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS	No. of Parliaments	No. of Depts.	Reason for Termination
John McNaught	102	3	1	Defeat of government in 1957
Joseph Blanchette	99	3	2	
Léopold Langlois	76	2	2	
William Benedictson	76	2	2	
Leslie Mutch	59	2	1	Not returned in 1953
John Dickey	45	1	1	Defeat of government in 1957
Colin Bennett	42	1	1	
Maurice Bourget	42	1	1	
Thomas Kirk	42	1	1	
Frederick Robertson	42	1	1	
William Weir	42	1	2	
Emmet McCuster	30	1	1	Not returned in 1953
Louis Joseph Cardin	14	1	1	Defeat of government in 1957
Paul Hellyer	14	1	1	
Thomas Reid	11	2	2	Resigned and made Senator
Loran Baker	3	1	1	Not returned in 1953

Note: McNaught and Blanchette were appointed by PM St. Laurent when he took over from PM King in 1948 before election of 1949 called.

Table A-4
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Diefenbaker and Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of months as Parliamentary Secretary Before Elevation				
	23rd Parliament (1957-58)	24th Parliament (1958-62)	25th Parliament (1962-63)	Total	No. of Depts.
Raymond O'Hurley	6	-	-	6	1
David Walker	6	-	-	6	1
George Ernest Halpenny	6	-	-	6	1
Walter Dinsdale	6	11	-	17	1
Richard Bell*	6	24	-	30	1
Marcel Lambert	6	29	-	35	2
Paul Martineau	-	24	-	24	1
Théogène Ricard	-	8	5	13	2
Frank McGee	-	-	1	1	1

* Gap of 9 months between retiring as parliamentary secretary and appointment to Ministry.

Table A-5
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Diefenbaker and Not Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as Parliamentary Secretary				No. of Depts.	Reason for Termination
	23rd Parliament (1957-58)	24th Parliament (1958-62)	25th Parliament (1962-63)	Total		
Thomas Bell	6	34	5	45	2	Defeat of government in 1963. Nesbitt not re-appointed in 1962 for 7 months.
Wallace Nesbitt	6	27	5	38	3	
John Charlton	6	29	-	35	2	Not returned in 1962 election
Clayton Hodgson	6	24	-	30	2	Not re-appointed
Warner Jorgensen	-	22	7	29	1	Defeat of government in 1963
Richard Thrasher	-	29	-	29	1	Not returned in 1962
Egan Chambers	-	29	-	29	1	
John Pallett	-	29	-	29	2	
Yvon-Roma Tassé	-	29	-	29	1	
Lewis Cardiff	-	29	-	29	2	Elected in 1962 but not re-appointed
Roland English	-	29	-	29	1	
Edmund Morris	-	29	-	29	2	
Henry Jones	-	7	6	13	1	Defeat of government in 1963

Table A-5 (continued)
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Diefenbaker and Not Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as Parliamentary Secretary				No. of Depts.	Reason for Termination
	23rd Parliament (1957-58)	24th Parliament (1958-62)	25th Parliament (1962-63)	Total		
Angus Macdonald	6	-	-	6	1	Not candidate in 1958
Arthur Maloney	6	-	-	6	1	Not re-appointed
Quinto Antonio Martini	-	6	-	6	1	Not re-elected in 1962
Louis-Joseph Pigeon	-	-	6	6	1	Government defeated in 1963
Heath McQuarrie	-	-	6	6	1	
Alf Hales	-	-	6	6	1	
Heward Grafftey	-	-	6	6	1	
James McBain	-	-	6	6	1	
Albert McPhillips	-	-	6	6	1	
Bob McCleave	-	-	6	6	1	Government defeated in 1963
James McGrath	-	-	6	6	1	
Jean Casselman	-	-	6	6	1	
Ged Baldwin	-	-	6	6	1	
John Borden Hamilton	3	-	-	3	1	Not re-appointed

Note: Following the election of 1958, no parliamentary secretaries appointed until passage of Parliamentary Secretaries Act of 1959. The result was a hiatus of 21 months from date election called in February 1958 until parliamentary secretaries appointed in November 1959.

Table A-6
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM St. Laurent and Elevated by PM Pearson to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS under PM St. Laurent
John MacNaught	102
George McIlraith	89
William Benedickson	76
Louis Joseph Cardin	14
Paul Hellyer	14

Table A-7
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Pearson and Elevated by Him to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS Before Elevation			
	26th Parliament (1963-65)	27th Parliament (1965-68)	Total	No. of Depts.
Edgar Benson	13	-	13	1
Lawrence Pennell	12	-	12	1
Jean Chrétien	6	15	21	2
Bryce Mackasey	6	25	31	2
Jean Luc Pépin	28	-	28	1
John Turner	16	-	16	1
Yvon Dupuis	9	-	9	1
Pierre Trudeau	-	15	15	1
Charles Granger	-	8	8	1

Table A-8
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Pearson and Not Elevated by Him to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS				
	26th Parliament (1963-65)	27th Parliament (1965-68)	Total	No. of Depts.	Notes
John Munro	29	28	57	4	Appointed to Ministry by PM Trudeau
Jack Davis	29	28	57	2	
Donald Macdonald	29	28	57	4	
Gérard Pelletier	-	12	12	1	
Bruce Beer	29	28	57	1	In office until end of Pearson government
Stanley Haidasz	29	28	57	3	
John Stewart	29	28	57	3	
James Byrne	29	28	57	2	
Jean-Charles Coutu	29	28	57	3	
Hubert Badani	29	-	29	2	Not re-appointed in 27th Parliament
Alexis Caron	29	-	29	2	
George McWilliam	29	-	29	2	
Chesley Carter	29	-	29	1	Resigned in 1966 and appointed to Senate
John Matheson	-	28	28	1	In office until end of Pearson government
Albert Béchard	-	28	28	1	
Margaret Ridout	-	28	28	1	
Jimmy Walker	-	28	28	2	
Richard Cashin	-	18	18	1	
Ovide Laflamme	-	12	12	2	
Guy Rouleau	10	-	10	1	Not a candidate in 1965
David Hahn	2	-	2	1	Not re-elected in 1965

Table A-9
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Mulroney and Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS			
	33rd Parliament (1984-88)	34th Parliament (1988-93)	Total	No. of Depts.
Pierre Blais	34	-	34	2
Frank Oberle	12	-	12	1
Bernard Valcourt	21	-	21	2
Paul Dick	21	-	21	3
Doug Lewis	36	-	36	2
John McDermid	24	-	24	1
Gerry Wiener	20	-	20	2
Monique Landry	20	-	20	2
Shirley Martin	11	-	11	1
Stewart McInnes	10	-	10	1
Bill Winegard	-	4	4	1
Pierre Vincent	50	48	98	3
Pauline Browes	28	30	58	3

Table A-10
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Mulroney and not Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS				
	33rd Parliament (1984-88)	34th Parliament (1988-93)	Total	No. of Depts.	Reason for Termination
Leonard Gustafson	48	55	103	1	In office until end of Mulroney government
Jean-Guy Hudon	48	55	103	5	
Monique Bernachez Tardiff	48	55	103	5	
Jack Shields	24	55	79	4	
Vincent Della Noce	24	55	79	6	
Michel Champagne	24	55	79	5	
Murray Cardiff	24	55	79	3	
Benno Friessen	14	55	69	4	
Suzanne Duplessis	12	55	67	4	
Lee Clark	12	55	67	2	
Ken James	6	54	60	3	
Jim Edwards	-	54	54	5	Also served a 2 year term as parliamentary secretary early in 33rd Parliament followed by a two year interval in another position
Michael Forestall	48	6	54	3	Not re-appointed at conclusion of third term
Lise Bourgault	12	37	49	3	
Blaine Thacker	18	31	49	3	
Bill Kempling	1	55	56	4	In office until end of government
Ross Belsher	-	50	50	2	
Patrick Boyer	-	50	50	3	
Ross Reid	-	50	50	2	
Robert Nicholson	-	50	50	2	
John McDougall	-	47	47	1	
Joe Price	48	-	48	1	Not re-elected in 1988
Bud Bradley	48	-	48	2	

Table A-10 (continued)
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Mulroney and not Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS				
	33rd Parliament (1984-88)	34th Parliament (1988-93)	Total	No. of Depts.	Reason for Termination
Dan MacKenzie	44	-	44	1	Dropped in July 1988 for opposing Bill C-72. Not a candidate in 1998.
Gary Gurbin	33	-	33	2	Not a candidate in 1988
Gabrielle Bertrand Claude Lanthier Gordon Towers	36 36 36	- - -	36 36 36	2 3 2	Not re-appointed
André Plourde	-	34	34	4	In office until government defeated
Dave Worthy	-	34	34	4	Chair: Procedure Committee
Albert Cooper	-	36	36	2	
Nicole Roy-Arcelin Lee Richardson	-	36 30	36 30	2	First elected 1988. In office until government defeated
David Kilgour	30	-	30	2	Left caucus for first time in 1987
Jane Greenaway	22	-	22	2	Did not run in 1988
Dorothy Dobbie Marcel Tremblay	- -	26 28	26 28	4 4	In office until government defeated
Charles Cook Mel Gass	28 24	- -	28 24	2 1	Not re-appointed

Table A-10 (continued)
Parliamentary Secretaries Appointed by PM Mulroney and not Elevated to the Ministry

Name	No. of Months as PS				
	33rd Parliament (1984-88)	34th Parliament (1988-93)	Total	No. of Depts.	Reason for Termination
Gerve Fretz	23	-	23	2	Not re-appointed
Geoff Scott	24	-	24	2	
Claudy Mailly	25	-	25	2	
Chris Speyer	25	-	25	1	
Pat Binns	23	-	25	1	Not a candidate in 1988
Stan Schellenberger	-	25	25	3	
Charles Langlois	-	28	28	3	
Peter McGrath	24	-	24	1	Not elected in 1988
Bob Wenman	-	23	23	1	
Howard Crosby	25	-	25	2	
Robert Clinch	25	-	25	2	Not a candidate in 1988
Richard Grisé	13	6	19	1	Became independent in April 1989 and resigned a month later
Jim Hawkes	13	6	19	1	Appointed whip
Jean-Guy Guilbault	-	12	12	1	Defeat of government
André Harvey	-	3	3	1	
Jean-Marc Robitaille	-	3	3	1	

1 "MPs' Views on Committee Organization," *Occasional Papers on Parliamentary Government* (Ottawa, Parliamentary Centre), no. 11 (March 2001), p. 6.

2 For more on this point, see Peter Dobell, "Reforming Parliamentary Practice: The Views of MPs," *Policy Matters*, Vol. 1, no. 9 (December 2000), pp. 13-22.

3 It has to be recognized that under the Chrétien government three members have remained in the chair of their committees for a longer time, but these are notable exceptions.

4 "MPs' Views on Committee Organization," p. 14.

5 See, for example, David Gamache Hutchison, *Executive Backbenchers or Political Nobodies? The Role of Parliamentary Secretaries in Canada* (Ottawa: Institute on Governance, 1999).

6 Dobell, "Reforming Parliamentary Practice: The Views of MPs," pp. 15-17.

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